"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

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A Unique Country Parish

By W. E. Finley

The following story is by Rev. W. E. Finley, D.D., an account of the pastorate of Rev. L. A. Zimmerman. Mr. and Mrs. Zimmerman are graduates of the College of Agriculture at Manhattan, Kansas. They came to the mountains over twenty years ago and deliberately accepted a reduction in their salary in connection with undertaking a farm which they have tilled, while he preached the Gospel, during more than twenty years. The success of this combination of farming and preaching is described by Dr. Finley, but it exceeds the description, for Mr. Zimmerman's work awakens enthusiasm and a kind of quiet amazement on the part of those who visit him at Cedar Cliff, near Marshall, North Carolina.

Warren H. Wilson

They came to us from the dry roots section of our country, from a university course and were influenced by the hope of teaching farming along with a Gospel message. They brought little with them except a fervent desire to preach and a hope of making a go of life in this mountain section. It was to one of our camps that they came, and after a week of counsel and advice, he preached his first sermon. I still remember the sermon, although twenty years have passed, and with that beginning there opened a ministry which has been very fruitful and which has been given a recompense that in a financial way has been startling. The preaching has been done from pulpit and from farm, and its effect has been great.

The man and his wife took all the chances in the world, but with a definite goal always before them, which has been reached in a large degree. They felt that they should have a pulpit from which to preach the better way of cultivating and saving the soil. To do this they bought a farm on credit, fifteen miles from the nearest town, in the roughest part of the mountains. With a meager outfit and handicapped by lack of means, they began a ministry which has been abundant in its results. They started living in an old log cabin whose only attraction was the happiness of its owners, always using in the development their brains and muscles, which were the only things they brought with them. Little by little the debt on the farm was paid and a new substantial house was built. Barns for the stock arose, pastures began to grow, crops that fed family and animals appeared.

During these years of hard work on the farm, the ministry to the people has been in four centers, and in two of these four new meeting houses have been built, erected by the efforts of the people and their minister. Two services each Sunday and three prayer meetings each week at distances of from four to six miles from the home are held. In the special services held more accessions have been received than is the average of the church in general. A program of Vacation Bible Schools is maintained, beside the socials and entertainments.

Because of a growing family the wife was forced to stay at home, but every Sabbath on the farm a Sabbath School of forty is held. The ministry also has been fruitful in many ways in improving the social standards of the people, and the minister's home is a much frequented center. At a farmers' meeting, the wife had us try her cheese sandwiches and told us that her press for the cheese making was an old baking powder can, and her cheese equaled the best. Many wives in the section now are making cheese from her example. Seven children have blessed the home; the oldest ones being graduated from high school this year. The wife has canned two thousand jars of fruit, vegetables and relishes this year. Around the house is piled the fuel taken from the farm clearing--a two years' supply. Many of the improvements have been made by barter, for the farm has been most successful in stock raising. A pig will get so much work done; a cow built the porch on the house. In this way there is little need for ready cash. I had occasion to visit the home not long ago. The minister was preparing the ground for alfalfa by harrowing the ground with a machine drawn by three horses; the pastures were dotted with cows and their calves. In the barn stamped a registered animal, brother to the milker with the best record in the State. The mows were full of hay, the cellar replete and grain stored that would give bread for all winter with a bountiful supply of corn.

Do we hear of low salaries and the difficulty of making ends meet? This man has had the magnificent grant of $600 a year from the Board, and perhaps $150 from his mission stations. With this salary he has raised a family of seven, paid for his farm, built a neat home, stocked his farm, and ministered as much as most pastors do to their churches.

Not long ago the Tennessee Valley Authority made an aerial survey of the mountains and a short time later one of their agents from Norris Dam drove up to the farm and asked what those strips on the land meant. They had noticed it on the map. A new kind of farming for the mountains had been tried--strip farming. A strip of corn twenty-five feet and a strip of grass to avoid erosion of the land. To terrace the land would be too costly, but these strips attained the same effect. So impressed was the Authority that it asked our preacher-farmer to visit the university and explain it to the classes. A short time afterward I said, "Well, I suppose you will be called at a large salary to introduce strip farming." But our minister replied, "I am firmly rooted to my churches and home. I will not go."

Is this man a farmer who preaches? No! He is a preacher who farms scientifically. Well read, somewhat a radical in social questions, and a good preacher, an idealist who is very practical. His accomplishments have been made at the cost of much sacrifice and determination. Up until the present time he has met his engagements riding horseback. An auto or a truck are beyond his means, he says.

Here is a ministry of twenty years that cannot fail to give satisfaction. He is happy in his home life, his quiver full of children, a highly developed farm, living on the fat of the land--happy in his ministry in the church and happy in his friends, who are legion. Many scoffed at first at his methods of farming, but have remained to imitate.

I have often wondered at the small salaries of the old time ministers and how they raised their families. I wonder no more because I have seen this unique ministry of today.